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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: PARTIAL COMPLIANCE AS NATIONWIDE STRIKE ENTERS ITS SECOND DAY

REF: LAGOS 2072

1. (U) SUMMARY: The nationwide sit-at-home strike called by the leadership of the NLC entered its second day October 12. In Abuja, most streets and markets were active, but the doors of most commercial banks and filling stations were closed to customers. In Lagos, the stock exchange and Central Bank were open, but only about 20 percent of vendors were back at the markets. Many schools across the country are not operating as a result of the strike. There were minor clashes in many parts of the country, although not Abuja. An adult was killed by police in Port Harcourt and a 12-year old boy in Kaduna, in addition to the apparent murder of labor activist Jerry Agbeigbe in what was may have been an unrelated incident. NLC leaders have called the strike, billed to run for four days, "a success" and maintain that the only solution is a return to the fuel subsidy. END SUMMARY.

AROUND NIGERIA

2. (U) The second day in Abuja saw streets and markets active, but the doors of most commercial banks and filling stations closed to customers. Many schools are also not operating as a result of the strike. Activities slowed at the Federal Secretariat and other GON offices due October 11, but they continue to operate.

3. (U) NLC Leader Benson Ukpa told us that the police in Abuja laid siege to the NLC Secretariat yesterday and prevented labor leaders from organizing a peaceful procession in and around the city to monitor the strike. The police also prevented labor leaders from walking to the Presidential Villa when President Obasanjo invited them. The police said that "trek" would attract hoodlums and miscreants thereby causing a breakdown of law and order.

4. (U) There has been more trouble in other parts of Nigeria. Halliburton security personnel told ConGen Lagos that police shot and killed an adult male at the Eleme junction on the outskirts of Port Harcourt October 12. In Kaduna, police yesterday shot and killed a 12-year boy after firing several shots at a group of demonstrators. A stray police bullet aimed at the demonstrators reportedly hit the young boy on the head, shattering his skull and killing him instantly. The source added that the demonstrators, mostly unemployed youths, were denouncing the recent fuel price hike while calling on residents to observe the sit-at-home strike. At least 40 demonstrators were arrested and a dozen sustained injuries during the stampede.

5. (U) "Area Boys" thugs and police were involved in many fracas. A ConGen Lagos vehicle ferrying mail was temporarily blocked in the Anthony area of Lagos by a bus loaded with people carrying bottles. A convoy of vehicles conveying NLC Mobilization Committee members was attacked in Lagos. No one was injured, but NLC contacts predict similar attacks by pro-government elements as the strike progresses. Local newspapers reported that the police arrested nine labor leaders in Awka, Anambra State, October 11 for allegedly "breaching public peace" while "monitoring compliance" with the strike, and clashed with Ibadan Polytechnic students protesting off campus.

6. (U) Jerry Agbeigbe, a prominent labor activist and former president of the National Association of Pilots and Engineering, was shot dead early this morning by unidentified assailants. His corpse reportedly was left at the Alapere Police Station in Lagos. Agbeigbe had been on the forefront of the agitation for the payment of salary and pension arrears for Nigerian Airways employees. It is unknown whether the killing was related to the Nigerian Airways situation, the strike action, or neither event.

7. (U) In other places:

LAGOS: Public offices and many businesses were closed again today. Reports from some areas of the city indicated that about 20 percent of vendors were back at the markets. Trading continued on the floor of the Nigerian Stock Exchange, though volume was expected to be lower than normal again today. The Lagos office of the Central Bank was operating normally. Commercial banks in some areas opened, though most remained largely closed to customers out of fear of harassment from "area boys." More than 1000 protesters blocked a major road in the Badagry area this morning. Lagos airport was open, with no indication that air traffic control was joining the strike, but domestic flights were interrupted in many places -- including a sixty percent reduction in flights between Abuja and Lagos. Some manufacturers closed factories, fearing people who the NLC sent to ensure compliance with the strike.

KANO: The northern commercial center saw more strike activity October 12 than October 11, and clashes with security forces have been reported.

ONITSHA: NLC officers are reportedly moving around to ensure compliance with the strike in this trading center for the Southeast. Some markets and banks that opened earlier in the day have been forced to close. The general hospital was also forced to shut down. Some government offices that opened in the morning were later closed, though workers remained in their offices. Private businesses and public transport operated without disturbance.

ENUGU: Public offices and schools remain closed. Commuters are moving undisturbed. Major markets are open. The police reportedly arrested labor (and possibly political) leaders while people were off the streets as a result of the strike.

IBADAN: Private schools were open and there was more pedestrian and vehicular movement than on October 11. Banks and government offices remained shut, however, and there were reports of clashes between police and protesters.

PORT HARCOURT: Some commercial facilities were open, and a small amount of commercial traffic was moving. All banks were closed. Motorists were reportedly displaying green leaves as a sign of solidarity with the strike. International flights were arriving as usual.

WARRI: Banks, schools, public hospitals, and major government offices were closed. Private schools remained open. NEPA offices were closed, but technicians were at work. Delta Broadcasting Service was off the air. The airport was closed.

OIL INDUSTRY

18. (SBU) ChevronTexaco and ExxonMobil both reported continued office operations with skeletal staffs. Oil and gas activities in the field, however, have not been affected. Oil unions continued to honor the strike, except for essential staff. Generally, firms in the oil sector said they do not expect production to be affected by the strike if it is confined to this week, as planned. However, if the situation goes into an indefinite strike, production issues may arise.

NLC STRIKE LEADERS GENERALLY SATISFIED

19. (SBU) Expressing displeasure over the level of compliance in Abuja, the NLC leadership nevertheless deems the strike "successful and very much on course." A top official at the NLC Secretariat said the strike would continue in spite of "several attempts by the government to foil the resolve of the Nigerian people." He said reports from many parts of Nigeria indicate that the public, especially workers and students have "positively responded to our call." NLC leaders claim even the Nigeria Police have cooperated, "tacitly expressing solidarity with the measures taken by the NLC and avoided enforcing government orders."

10. (U) NLC officials were less happy about the recent inauguration of a 33-man committee by President Obasanjo to cushion the effect of the recent price hike, describing it as "diversionary and insulting to Nigerians." The Committee was inaugurated yesterday at the Presidential Villa. According to President Obasanjo, the Committee would "collate, harmonize and coordinate measures that will be agreed to bring about a short term relief and medium term positive impact on the effect of high oil prices." Although NLC head Adams Oshiomhole and four other labor leaders were included in the Committee, strike leader Ukpa said the

NLC had "embarked on the strike to force the government to revert to old fuel prices, not to discuss palliative measures that are full of deceit."
ROBERTS